



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2022-0121; FXES11130400000-223-FF04EF4000]

Receipt of Incidental Take Permit Application and Proposed Habitat Conservation Plan for the Sand Skink and Blue-Tailed Mole Skink; Polk County, FL; Categorical Exclusion

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability; request for comments and information.

SUMMARY: We, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce receipt of an application from Polk County, Florida (applicant), for an incidental take permit (ITP) under the Endangered Species Act. The applicant requests the ITP to take the federally listed sand skink and blue-tailed mole skink incidental to the construction of roadway improvements at an existing paved-road intersection in Polk County, Florida. We request public comment on the application, which includes the applicant's proposed habitat conservation plan (HCP), and on the Service's preliminary determination that this HCP qualifies as "low effect," categorically excluded under the National Environmental Policy Act. To make this determination, we used our environmental action statement and low-effect screening form, both of which are also available for public review.

DATES: We must receive your written comments on or before [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*].

ADDRESSES: *Obtaining Documents:* You may obtain copies of the documents online in Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2022-0121 at <https://www.regulations.gov>.

Submitting Comments: If you wish to submit comments on any of the documents, you may do so in writing by one of the following methods:

- *Online:* <https://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for

submitting comments on Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2022-0121.

- *U.S. mail:* Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2022-0121; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: JAO/3W, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041–3803.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: John Wrublik, by U.S. mail (see **ADDRESSES**), by telephone at 772-469-4282 or via email at

john_wrublik@fws.gov. Individuals in the United States who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability may dial 711 (TTY, TDD, or TeleBraille) to access telecommunications relay services. Individuals outside the United States should use the relay services offered within their country to make international calls to the point-of-contact in the United States.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: We, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce receipt of an application from the Polk County, Florida (applicant), for an incidental take permit (ITP) under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*). The applicant requests the ITP to take the federally listed sand skink (*Neoseps reynoldsi*) and blue-tailed mole-skink (*Eumeces egregius lividus*) (skinks) incidental to the construction of improvements at an existing paved-road intersection in Polk County, Florida. We request public comment on the application, which includes the applicant’s HCP, and on the Service’s preliminary determination that this HCP qualifies as “low effect,” categorically excluded under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*). To make this determination, we used our environmental action statement and low-effect screening form, both of which are also available for public review.

Proposed Project

The applicant requests a 5-year ITP to take skinks via the conversion of

approximately 2.09 acres (ac) of occupied nesting, foraging, and sheltering skink habitat incidental to the construction of safety improvements at the intersection of County Road 547 and Orchid Drive/Holly Hill Road, within a 2.09-ac parcel at latitude 28.157638°, longitude -81.631621°, Polk County, Florida. The applicant proposes to mitigate for take of the skinks by purchasing credits equivalent to 4.19 ac of skink-occupied habitat from a Service-approved conservation bank. The Service would require the applicant to purchase the credits prior to engaging in any phase of the project.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made available to the public. While you may request that we withhold your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Our Preliminary Determination

The Service has made a preliminary determination that the applicant's project, including the installation of turn lanes and traffic signals at an existing paved roadway intersection, would individually and cumulatively have a minor or negligible effect on the skinks and the environment. Therefore, we have preliminarily concluded that the ITP for this project would qualify for categorical exclusion and that the HCP is low effect under our NEPA regulations at 43 CFR 46.205 and 46.210. A low-effect HCP is one that would result in (1) minor or negligible effects on federally listed, proposed, and candidate species and their habitats; (2) minor or negligible effects on other environmental values or resources; and (3) impacts that, when considered together with the impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable similarly situated projects, would not result in significant cumulative effects to environmental values or resources over time.

Next Steps

The Service will evaluate the application and the comments to determine whether to issue the requested permit. We will also conduct an intra-Service consultation pursuant to section 7 of the ESA to evaluate the effects of the proposed take. After considering the preceding and other matters, we will determine whether the permit issuance criteria of section 10(a)(1)(B) of the ESA have been met. If met, the Service will issue ITP number PER 0049071 to Polk County, Florida.

Authority

The Service provides this notice under section 10(c) of the ESA (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 17.32), and NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) and its implementing regulations (40 CFR 1506.6 and 43 CFR 46.305).

Robert L. Carey,

Division Manager, Environmental Review,

Florida Ecological Services Office.

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